

Congresswoman Barbara Lee
DIMP Hearing on Combating Trafficking in Persons
June 22, 2005

Thank you Madame Chair.

Let me first thank you and Ranking Member Maloney for organizing this important hearing.

Human trafficking is a horrendous and perverse practice that is akin to modern day slavery. It contributes to the objectification of women and perpetuates gender inequality, and it must be stopped.

As a member of the International Relations Committee, and as a vocal advocate against the global HIV/AIDS pandemic, I believe very strongly that we can and must do more to fight human trafficking.

Even as we deplore the practice of trafficking, and as we work to prosecute those who engage in it, we must also eliminate the underlying factors that cause it. Otherwise we will never be able to end this terrible practice.

We've got to focus on alleviating poverty; and strengthening weak or corrupt judicial systems that ignore trafficking, or worse look the other way.

Most importantly we've got to focus on women.

We have to make sure that women and girls have the opportunity to get an education, to learn a trade and earn a living, to feed and clothe their children, and to own and inherit property. And we've got to empower women so that they are truly in charge of their own bodies.

This is not just a law enforcement issue. It's a human rights issue.

So I hope that as we proceed with the hearing today we keep that in mind.

Thank you and I yield back.